

## THE IROQUOIS WAMPUM.

AN ANCIENT TREASURE THAT HAS DIS-  
APPEARED.THE LOSS DISCOVERED AT THE DEATH OF  
CHIEF WEBSTER—SOMETHING ABOUT THE  
ORIGIN AND USE OF WAMPUM.

Syracuse, N. Y., July 8.

Now that Chief Thomas Webster, the keeper of the Wampum of the Elder Brothers of the Iroquois Confederacy, is dead and buried, it is discovered that most of the wampum that was in his possession has been stolen. The chief kept his wampum under his bed at his hut on the Onondaga Reservation, south of this city. Three years ago, at the time of the Onondaga Historical Association's celebration in this city, this wampum was exhibited in charge of Chief Webster. It was all intact at that time. Now some of the most valuable pieces are missed. It is said here that some of the missing pieces have turned up in the collections in the State Museum and the Smithsonian Institution. The Mayor of Albany is said to have come into the most valuable piece, called the Hiawatha belt. The Indians are very reticent when asked about the wampum, but it is said that several of the chiefs became aware of the theft several weeks before Chief Webster's death. Men here who are acquainted with the affairs of the Indians say that little of the wampum is left at Webster's hut, and intimate that the most valuable pieces were stolen and sold by somebody who deceived the aged chief.

The Indian legends consider Hiawatha to be the inventor of Wampum, asserting that his wampum was of fresh-water shells and bird quills. The Onondaga wampum belts are not over a century old, and all but the beads in them were made by white men. The death of Chief Webster removes the last of the aged keepers of the wampum of the Six Nation Confederacy. He died last Sunday and was buried on Tuesday with pagan ceremonies in charge of Chiefs Daniel La Fert and Thomas Lyon. Abram Hill, keeper of the Younger Brothers, died on February 28, 1895.

The office of wampum keeper is one of the most ancient in the Confederacy. The Elder Brothers consist of the Onondagas, Mohawks and Senecas; the Younger Brothers of the Oneidas, Cayugas and Tuscaroras. Chief Hill, who was an Oneida, lived to be seventy-seven years old, and Chief Webster was seventy-six years of age. The Websters are mentioned among the most noted chiefs of the Onondagas of recent years. They are the descendants of Ephraim Webster, Onondaga's first settler, who married an Indian. These descendants have always lived with the Onondagas. Harry Webster, one of Ephraim Webster's children, was long a chief of high reputation. Thomas Webster came from this same family.

For nearly a year Chief Webster had been weak and feeble, and death is attributed to old age. Chief Webster had a prominent part in the "Feasts" of the Confederacy. He wore a feather headdress, and made long addresses to the Great Spirit. In these ceremonies the wampum played its part. Messengers have been sent to the various tribes to announce the death of Chief Webster and to call a condoling council to raise a chief and keeper of the wampum—that is, what is left of it.

If the wampum belts which have been preserved at Onondaga Castle for a century or more should be gradually disappearing into the hands of private collectors it would, indeed, be a pity. Were it not that they have been used from time immemorial (but with less and less intelligence, I fear) in some of the interesting ceremonies of the Indians, especially that which preserves the traditions of the formation of the Iroquois League, or the Federation of the Five Nations, it would have been wise had the belts long ago been acquired by the State, so as to prevent their dissipation. The reverence of the Indians for what they are persuaded are historic memorials of their distant past might have safeguarded them so far as their own people were concerned, but they were always a temptation to white men who had none of the scruples of the Indians, and it is more strange that any should be left at Onondaga Castle than that a portion of the collection should have been stolen. It would be interesting now to know how many of the belts taken to the Five Nations Reserve on the Grand River in Canada after the revolution are still there.

## AT THE "CONDOLING COUNCIL."

The wampum belts figure chiefly at the ceremony of the "Condoling Council," as it has been called since Mr. Hale published "The Iroquois Book of Rites" in 1883. At this council chiefs are "raised up" to take the places in the federal Senate vacated by the death or removal of other chiefs. After the acceptance by the Senate of a new councillor he takes his seat among the others of his rank, and the wampum belts are brought out by the keeper and expounded by him. Despite the fact that a good deal of doubt has been cast on the whole matter, Mr. Hale attached much value to such "reading of the archives." In September, 1871, he secured permission of the council of the Six Nations on the reserve in Canada, near Brantford, and gathered the chiefs who knew most of the traditions of their people together in the house of Chief George H. M. Johnson.

There all the wampum belts were brought, and their meaning was explained to Mr. Hale. A photograph of the group preserves the incident. I have a copy presented to me by Mr. Hale

when I began my studies into the music of the ceremonies of condolence. Mr. Hale has recorded on the back the names of all the chiefs engaged in the conference—their English names, titular Indian names and the meaning of the latter. They were Joseph Snow, "Hahiron" ("He who scatters"), Onondaga chief and fire-keeper; George H. M. Johnson, "Teyonhelikon" ("Double life"), Mohawk chief and Government interpreter; John Buck, "Skanawahiti," ("Beyond the River," more correctly, "Swamp"), Onondaga chief and wampum keeper; John Smoke Johnson, "Sakayengwarahon" ("Disappearing mist"), Mohawk chief and speaker of the council; Isaac Hill, "Kawenenseronton" ("The voice suspended"), Onondaga chief and fire-keeper, and Seneca Johnson, "Kanoneritawih" ("Entangled hair given"), Seneca chief. The information given to Mr. Hale on this occasion he embodied in the introduction and notes to the "Iroquois Book of Rites."

In 1892 John Buck, who chanted the Iroquois hymn, and what I have since called "The Iroquois Litany," for me by the hour while the Rev. Isaac Bearfoot acted as interpreter between us, also brought the wampum belts to the meeting place for my inspection and explained them. What he said led me to believe that they were as much mnemonic signs—helps to memory—as anything else. They were of several kinds. On one of them was a row of figures like half-diamonds, each extending across the belt. From Buck's explanation I gathered that the figures were conventionalized hearts. This perpetuated the memory of a treaty.

"With what tribe?" I asked.

"The Eries," answered Buck.

"About what time?"

"About two hundred years after the white man came to America."

This illustrates the starting point which Buck chose for nearly all his estimates of time. So many years or centuries before or after the white man came. It is also the basis of David Cusick in his singular but extremely interesting and suggestive "History of the Six Nations." Describing the extinction of a tribe in battle, this writer, himself a Tuscarora, says: "This fate happened probably about two thousand five hundred winters before Columbus discovered the America."

## JOHN BUCK'S INTERPRETATION.

Belts of pure white beads Buck described as records of treaties of peace. Stripes diagonally across a belt, he said, were symbols of agreement that the tribe giving it would help the Six

pattern (a meander) was said to have been sent by whites as a confirmation of a treaty.

The collection of belts brought by Buck did not appear so numerous as that shown on Mr. Hale's photograph. Its most interesting feature was half of the belt which, according to tradition, signified the formation of the Iroquois Confederacy. The circumstance that he had only half the belt Buck explained by saying that when the Six Nations separated after the American Revolution, the majority leaving their ancestral homes in what is now New-York State to become the wards of the British people, for whom they had fought, in Canada, the wampum belts were divided between the two bodies. In the case of this belt, the league belt, neither body wished to surrender it to the other, so it was cut in two and each body took a half. This belt, however, is not that which is described as the Hiawatha belt, in the possession of the Mayor of Albany.

The latter belt, according to a description recently printed, contains four oblong figures four inches by five, two of which are on either side of a diamond-shaped figure in the middle. All the figures are connected by links and are expounded as follows: The diamond represents the Onondaga Nation, which was the wealthiest and most powerful. The other four figures stand for the Senecas, Mohawks, Cayugas and Oneidas.

These were the original five nations of the confederacy. The sixth nation is the Tuscarora, which did not enter the league until early in the eighteenth century, after the English had driven it out of South Carolina. Now the belt believed by the Canadian Iroquois to be the record of the formation of the league ("The Great Peace," as Mr. Hale would have it called) shows only a row of conventionalized human figures clasping hands, an exceedingly simple and rude design, for all the world like the chains of dolls which are cut out of paper to amuse children.

## THE QUESTION OF ANTIQUITY.

If the belt is an authentic record, it might be any way from two hundred to five hundred years old. Cusick, the Indian historian, who wrote down the traditions of his people without questioning them, and then tried to fix chronological points for the sake of his white readers, said the league was formed a thousand years before the coming of Columbus.

Morgan, taking the testimony of the Indians and collating it, fixed upon the year 1450; Horatio Hale, calculating the rate of change in the languages of the Iroquois, came to the same

laged in 1779. I have carefully examined all the Onondaga belts at various times, and all are of white men's beads and often strings and threads. Some have buckskin thongs. General Carrington in 1891 secured the covenant belt with the United States, and another of interest, for the Government. The Covenant Belt had men holding hands, but the chevron appears on some of the wider belts.

What Dr. Beauchamp calls the Covenant Belt corresponds with the belt which John Buck showed me as the League Belt, but Dr. Beauchamp makes no reference to the mutilation which I have described.

As to the antiquity of wampum, it furnishes another troublesome point. Wampum has been found in the mounds of the Mound Builders. Dr. Beauchamp says, however, that the Iroquois had little or no wampum until the Dutch came. L. H. Morgan says that they used fresh-water shell beads of a spiral form until they had marine shells from the Dutch, but none have been found. Short colored sticks were used for some time after the whites came. In 1714 the Five Nations gave some sticks of wampum to confirm a treaty, but a year later replaced them with belts, showing that the sticks were a temporary expedient. Cusick does not mention wampum in his narrative until he reaches the story of the formation of the league.

## HIAWATHA IN THE STORY.

Singularly enough, he knows nothing about Hiawatha in connection with that story, yet several legends connect that Onondaga chief (whose imperishable monument is the history of the Five Nations, and not, as the world thinks, the poem of Longfellow, which makes him an Ojibway demi-god) with the invention of wampum. Mr. Hale translates Hiawatha with "He who seeks the wampum belt." One of the Iroquois legends tells how in his journeys undertaken to bring about the confederation of tribes Hiawatha came to a lake which he wished to cross. While he was gazing at the water a flock of ducks settled in it and drank and soaked it all up. Its dry bottom the chief found to be covered with white shells, which he gathered and made into wampum. According to the received tradition, Hiawatha, having failed to enlist the interest of the head chief of his own people, the Onondagas, in his enterprise, joined the Mohawks and persuaded them to take the initiative. A story told to Dr. Beauchamp bears upon this, and also on the use made by Hiawatha of wampum:

He builds a fire near the Mohawk town, which was reported to the chief, who sent young men out to see whether it was friend or foe. They crept near and looked through the bushes. Sitting by the fire they saw an old man stringing short eagle quills. He did not look up, and they went back and made their report. They were sent to invite the old man to a council, but he neither looked up nor answered, stringing the quills as before. They repeated the chief's words, and when they spoke the third time he raised his head and held up a string of beads, saying: "When your chief wants me at a council he must send me a string like this." The quills were those of the wampum bird, which soars very high and is rarely seen, but which Hiawatha could call down. The Mohawk chief had none of these, and sent a string of partridge quills instead. Hiawatha came and first showed them how to make and use wampum, and then proposed the league.

## THE WAMPUM BIRD.

Concerning the wampum bird another Indian legend tells how a man once saw a wampum bird in the woods and told the head chief, who offered his daughter to any one who would kill it. Every time it was hit it would throw off wampum, and still had as much as before. At last a small boy from another tribe wished to try, and was opposed, but the chief allowed him to shoot and the bird fell. He divided the wampum between his own tribe and that of his bride, and it became the offering of peace and for injuries.

I have already mentioned that a white wampum belt was said to be a peace belt. In the Hiawatha story, as told by Mr. Hale, the great missionary and philanthropist covers his breast with strings of white shells when he goes to the Mohawks with his message of peace. These stories also illustrate a use to which wampum is still put among the Indians. When John Buck died in 1893 (the office of Wampum Keeper had been in his family for four generations) the letter from the Reserve near Brantford, which brought the information to me, contained two purple wampum beads strung on a bit of thread. They were the proofs of the genuineness of the letter and the truthfulness of its message.

Abram Hill, an Oneida chief, long a companion of the dead Chief Webster in the ceremonies of the New-York Iroquois, once explained this value of wampum expressly and succinctly: "Indian's wampum same as white man's letter." Strings of wampum carried by messengers serve as credentials. So, too, they are used in the condolence ceremony, where also the arrangement of the beads on the string acts as an aid to the memory. Chief Webster was called on ten years ago to explain the use of wampum to a committee of the General Assembly investigating "the Indian problem" in New-York. He said that wampum meant "nothing to white man, all to Indian"; he also related a tradition as follows: "There is a tree set in the ground, and it touches the heavens. Under that tree sits this wampum. It sits on a log. Coals of fire are unquenchable, and the Six Nations are at the council fire held by the tribe. To-do-da-ho, a member of the bear clan, is the great chief here. He has a descendant in our tribe to-day. His name is Frank Logan. One of the uses of wampum is for a symbol in the election of officers. The wampum braves keep the treaties of the nation."

H. E. K.



CHIEF JOHN BUCK.

(Of the fourth generation of Iroquois wampum keepers.)

Nations in war—the diagonal figure being interpreted as props for the Long House—the symbol of the confederacy. One belt which showed in its middle an oblong figure with a colored spot in its centre Buck said was the record of a treaty granting hunting and fishing privileges, that is to say, the tribes exchanging the belts agreed to use certain hunting and fishing territory in common. When asked how this was symbolized by the design on the belt, Buck explained that the parallelogram was a dish, the spot in its centre a piece of meat. A belt of purple containing a white conventionalized design like that commonly called the Greek key

conclusion as Morgan; the Rev. William M. Beauchamp, of Baldwinsville, N. Y., one of the most indefatigable students of the New-York Iroquois, has satisfied himself that the year 1600 is nearer the real date.

The question is tempting, but cannot be entered on now. What is important in connection with the belts which used to be kept at Onondaga Castle is that Dr. Beauchamp holds them all to be of very recent origin. In his notes on Cusick's history reprinted in his book, "The Iroquois Trail," he says:

It does not seem probable that a single belt was left when the Onondaga towns were pu-